

Missing Page

A
S E R M O N

Occasioned by the

D E A T H

OF THE REVEREND

BENJAMIN GROSVENOR, D. D.

Who departed this Life

AUGUST 27. 1758. in the Eighty-third
Year of his Age.

P R E A C H E D A T

S B Y - S Q U A R E,

September 10. 1758.

By *JOHN BARKER.*

L O N D O N:

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P S A L M XXIII. 4.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me ; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

IN the preceding psalm, the royal author describes himself, as in a state of sorrow and complicated affliction ; and, whether we understand him as representing his own state and circumstances, or, in the spirit of prophecy, foretelling and describing the sufferings of the *Messiah*, of whom he was an eminent type, as well as a renowned progenitor, it is not to be wondered, that he should fly to God for succour and consolation ; *be not far from me, for trouble is near ; — be not far from me O Lord ; O my strength, hasten thee to help me.*^a But in this psalm, he seems to have emerged out of that gloomy

state, in which he was before involved ; and to express, not only an unshaken trust, but an unusual alacrity in the divine patronage and power. *The Lord, (says he,) is my shepherd, I shall not want, he maketh me to lye down in green pastures, he leadeth me beside the still waters ; he restoreth my soul, he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*^e Here the psalmist represents himself in a state of prosperity and felicity, of tranquility and enjoyment, happy in the pastoral and parental care of his father, and his God ; and then it was no very uncommon mark, no such distinguishing evidence, of his courage or piety, that his heart should be lively, and *make it's boast in him.*ⁱ

But could a man, of the psalmist's knowledge and experience, reckon upon the long continuance of this cheerful scene ? no sure ! he well knew the instability of all human felicity, and looked forward to the valley of affliction, to see how *he* who was disposed to rejoice in God, when he was allowed to recline and repose himself on the vivid pastures, and refresh and regale himself, on the enamelled borders of a gentle murmuring stream ; to see, I say, how *he* could support himself,

^e Psal. xxiii. 1, 2, 3.

ⁱ Ps. xxxiv. 2.

himself, and maintain his fortitude and his trust in God, in case he should be carried into the dark and dreary valley of affliction. *Yea, (adds he,) though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me ; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.* This was supposing the worst, according to an eye of sense ; for the edge and sting of most other afflictions is, that they are likely to end in death. He, therefore, who can look death in the face without dismay, who can walk among the monuments of the dead, who can take the king of terrors by the cold hand ; he, who can pass a serious hour of contemplation, in the valley of the shadow of death, and say, “ hither I am willing to come, “ whenever my father calls me,”* he is a happy man ; especially if he can say this, on the principles on which it is here said by the pious psalmist ; *yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me ; thy rod and*

* Some critics have supposed the words have no farther meaning, than *a state of affliction*, but in the ensuing discourse, I have chose to consider them as referring to *the time of death*, to which, (at least,) they may well be accommodated.

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and thy staff they comfort me.* In further dis-
coursing on which words, I propose,

- I. To fix your meditations, and my own, on that season, or period of human life, which the psalmist here describes, as *walking through the valley of the shadow of death.*
- II. To examine the grounds of his support and consolation, in this expected awful season.

And then conclude with some suitable application.

I. Let us take a pleasing painful view, of the valley of the shadow of death.

Death is the wages of sin. It is the sentence pronounced on the whole human race, in consequence of our original, and universal apostacy. *In Adam all die.*^o *Death passeth upon all men, because all have sinned.*^u All, I say, except they who may be alive at the day of judgment, who must undergo a change, equivalent to dying. The pious, as well as the profane, the wealthy and indigent, the honourable and base, must all lye down in the silent grave, and be covered with

with the clods of the valley. This path is continually trodden, but the footsteps of the passengers are all one way. *Joshua* says, *behold! this day, I am going the way of all the earth.*^a And *Job* describes it, *as the way from whence he should not return.*^c The world by this means, (it is true,) is delivered from the impious and unjust, from the disturbers of the peace and repose of families, from the tyrants and oppressors of mankind, from those whose breath fills the air with blasphemy, or whose hands stain the earth with blood; but then, by this means likewise, it is bereaved of the ingenious and learned, of the virtuous and benevolent, of the pious and publick-spirited, of those, who in private life, are the succourers and friends of the distressed, and the encouragers of modest virtue; or, who in publick life, are the avengers of the wrongs, or the defenders of the rights of mankind; whose lives bless and consecrate the cities and countries where they reside, and who are the ornaments and bulwarks of society.

And what is this road which is so much frequented? Is it safe and pleasant? is it filled with no doleful cries? is it annoyed with

^a *Josh.* xxiii. 14.^c *Job* x. 21.

with no ghastly spectacles ? alas, no ! It is a gloomy and a noisome valley, *a land of darkness, and the shadow of death ; a land of darkness itself, without any order, and where the light is as darkness.*ⁱ And those who pass through it, at the same time with us, are able to afford us no succour.

The human body is composed of very delicate, and very frail materials. When we are in perfect strength, and in the vigour of life, we are sometimes apt to suppose, that death is no such severe conflict and struggle, as it is generally represented ; but when the constitution is impaired by sickness, or become feeble through age, the thoughts of death, of the mortal dew hanging on our countenances, of the dim and sunken eye, of the trembling limbs, and faltering speech, and dying groan ; these harbingers of death strike us with an universal chill, and make us dread the tyrant's nearer approach.

I acknowledge some men have more constitutional firmness and fortitude, than others. Those storms and hurricanes in life, which are necessary to make some men thoughtful and considerate, shall fill others with terror, and almost drive them to desperation. One

man

ⁱ Job x. 21, 22.

man shall suffer more on the death of an old acquaintance, than another does on the loss of an only son. One unfortunate or imprudent branch or member of a family, shall sometimes make one parent miserable, when another shall bear up, under the ingratitude and dissoluteness, of a whole race of prodigals. So likewise, on the approach towards the dark valley. One shall start at the mention of it, shall be apprehensive that the slightest indisposition which seizes him, that the least pain or numbness he feels in any member of the body, or, that every occasional lowness of the animal spirits, is the certain presage, and immediate fore-runner of death; whilst others shall *possess months and years of vanity, and shall have wearisome nights* [°] in a long succession appointed them, and yet betray no remarkable dejection.

Nevertheless, certain it is, that with all the allowances which we are obliged to make for difference of constitutions, the thoughts of passing through the dark valley, must be a subject of some concern to every considerate man, when this event approach-

es. All the world then seems to be dying to us.—All the beauties of the creation languish in our sight.—The corporeal and intellectual eye grow dark. — Our clothes hang heavy on us.—Our food loses its relish.—*The grasshopper is a burden,*^u and yet our bed is a bed of thorns.—Friendship has no more charms to revive us. — Our projects and purposes of enjoyment or usefulness are blasted. — The closest ties and bonds of natural affection are dissolving. — There is a total wreck of nature, and according to the best discernment of an eye of sense, we are swiftly to pass through a narrow gulph, and plunge into a fathomless ocean.

And is there no pain in such an expectation! does a stately building, fallen to decay, cause an uneasy sensation in every beholder? Is the sight of a country or city laid waste, an awful and moving spectacle? Does a solemn gloom hang upon our minds, when we walk amongst the tombs of the dead? Can't we behold the dying pang, or hear the expiring groan, or survey the breathless corpse, of a once endeared and beloved friend, without turning pale and trembling? I say, do such

such awful and venerable ruins strike us with a damp, and fill our minds with horror ? And can we calmly think of being the principal figure and character in such a sad tragedy, and not feel our blood creep through our veins, and be in some pain for the issue ?

Well, this is the dark side of the subject ! to be infirm and sickly, to be old and die, to be stretched out a breathless and a senseless corpse, and be shut up in a narrow tomb, and be thrust out of the sight of the living, that we may not offend and annoy, those whom we were wont to instruct and delight; sure I am, this is a very sad and humbling consideration : and this is the season, and these are the circumstances, the psalmist had in view, when he said, *yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.*

But this is not the last end of man. It is not sealing us up in eternal oblivion ; it is not consigning us to absolute annihilation. It breaks all our present relations and connexions, it is true ; It cuts asunder all the ligaments, by which we are fastened to this material and momentary system ; but there is one relation which it does not affect, which

it cannot change, or reach, or dissolve ; I mean, our relation to God, to the Lord and Sovereign of the universe, the supreme Father of men and angels. And what relation is that ? It is the relation of creatures to their Creator, of subjects to their sovereign, aye, and of criminals to their judge. And how does our passing through the valley of the shadow of death, affect us in these relations ? Why, it is our transition and translation from a state of trial, to a state of recompence ; it is calling us to pass our accounts ; it is remanding us back from this distant country, where we have been stationed for a time, in order that we may be placed at the footstool of the throne of the Majesty of heaven and earth, and at the bar of the eternal Judge. And where is that man, where is that son of *Adam*, who dares to say he is not a sinner ? And where is that sinner who dares to say, he has *nothing to fear* ? The writer to the *Hebrews* observes, *we know him who hath said, vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompence, saith the Lord*. And again, *the Lord shall judge his people*. *It is therefore*, adds he, *a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living*

ing God.^a It is impossible, that any thoughtful man, should take a view of the failings, and miscarriages, and willful transgressions, of his past life, and have no kind or degree of concern, in the near approach of that awful period, when he must give an account of himself unto God ; especially, if he is firmly persuaded of the consequences of the decision of that important day ; i. e. that it will subject him to a sentence from which there is no appeal, and fix him in a state of bliss or woe, inconceivable and unchangeable.

And is it possible then the psalmist should say, *yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil?* — How could he or any man, with such a valley, with such a dark and lowring prospect before him, say this without great and unwarrantable presumption ? Did he expect a translation ? Did he expect his spirit would take its flight out of the body at once, without staying till the harbingers of death pulled or tore down this earthly tabernacle ? On what then was this courage and resolution founded,

^a Heb. x. 30, 31.

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founded, and how far did it extend ? And
this leads me to the

II^d. General head ; namely, to enquire and
examine on what grounds this good man's
support and consolation was founded.

And I do not apprehend the psalmist, by
saying, *I will fear no evil*, designed us to un-
derstand, that he vaunted of a *stoical apathy*
or insensibility, — that he considered death
as no evil. — He knew it was the curse God
denounced against sin, and as such, he was
too pious a man *to despise* it ; and he had all
the soft and tender feelings of humanity ;
nay, he was a man, (if we may judge from
his history, and from his writings,) of a very
delicate composition, he was a lover of mu-
sick, susceptible of the gentlest impressions,
actuated by the strongest affections, and en-
riched and distinguished by a very fine and
beautiful imagination ; the distresses he met
with in his family, and in his kingdom,
at times deeply affected him, and no man
ever lamented with greater bitterness and an-
guish of soul, his personal guilt and wicked-
ness, or seems to have been driven, in the
sense of it, nearer to the borders of despair.

We

We cannot suppose therefore, that he did not see death in all the solemn fable in which I have before represented it, or that he did not contemplate it, as a very awful and affecting crisis ; nevertheless, I apprehend, he spake in this passage as a penitent sinner, who had deeply humbled himself before God, and who had taken refuge in those promises of divine mercy and forgiveness, which were afforded to the church of *Israel*. His last words are a plain evidence of this : *Although my house (says he) be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure, for this is all my salvation and all my desire.*^c

When he says therefore, *I will fear no evil* ; it is as if he had said, — “ Although “ I do not expect to be favoured with a “ translation as was *Enoch*, although I am “ sensible that to descend from my throne “ and be laid in a tomb, and from receiving “ the homage of my subjects, and the spoils “ of my enemies, is a great stoop of ma- “ jesty ; although I know the stroke of death “ may be violent or lingering, and that the “ separation of soul and body is often at- “ tended

“ tended with strong convulsions of animal
“ nature, and that through the gates of
“ death, I must pass to the tribunal of my
“ Almighty Judge; yet I am not so alarmed
“ and distressed at these events, as to be
“ thrown into any agony or consternation.”

And allowing for the difference of the two dispensations, we may take his meaning to be similar to that of St. Paul, *O death where is thy sting, O grave where is thy victory? the sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law, but thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*¹ But there are two particular grounds of support and consolation mentioned in the text, which deserve our particular attention. And the first is,

1. *For thou art with me.* To have the presence of God with us in any season of life, is highly valuable and desirable. A state of the highest worldly prosperity without this, would be no joy to a good man, and with it every scene and state of adversity may be endured and supported; but in no season is it of so much importance to have God with us, as when we are to enter and pass through the

¹ 1 Cor xv. 55.

the valley of the shadow of death. Nothing is more encouraging and animating to a man who has any considerable enterprize to execute, or any conflict to endure, than to have a wise and powerful friend near him, to afford him counsel and assistance, as occasion may require. But no earthly friend can afford us much succour or assistance when we come to die; we must enter the lists alone with the king of terrors. The valley of death is often so dark, that we lose the sight of every earthly friend and object of consolation, and to all the real evils we then suffer, we are often haunted with imaginary terrors; to borrow the language of *Eliphaz*, *fear comes upon us, and trembling, which makes all our bones shake, then a spirit passes before us, which makes the hair of our flesh to stand up.*^o No man can be sure to what low state of spirits he may be reduced, when he passes through this gloomy valley. But though the eye of sense may be totally extinguished and absorbed, yet if by an eye of faith we can see God, if we can see him not as made known in the dark sayings, and doubtful conjectures, of the *Heathen Moralists*

lifts and Philosophers, but as made known to us in his Word and in his Son, *as declared by the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth*; if we can see him in the glory of his attributes, and in the grace of his promises, and in the immutability of his covenant; if we can see him as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and through him our reconciled Friend, and Father, and God. If in this sense we can say, *thou art with me*, we may also add, *yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.*

We who live under the christian dispensation, are undoubtedly favoured with clearer and more express discoveries of the grace and mercy of God in the salvation of the apostate world, than they who lived under the Old Testament dispensation; nevertheless, I am fully persuaded, *David* and other good men, under that dispensation, had sufficient discoveries to enlighten the dark valley, and to enable them to say, *thou art with me*, and thou wilt be with me as a merciful, and faithful God, and Friend, in the last conflict and agony of nature; and whoever is favoured with a sight of God in this sense, may

may chearfully declare, as *Philip* did to our blessed Saviour in the days of his flesh, *Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us.*^a But then I add,

2. *David* takes notice, that *the rod and staff of God they would comfort him.*

The goodness of God is celebrated in this Psalm, under the beautiful allegory of a shepherd's care of his flock, and therefore the shepherd's staff, or crook is here mentioned, as what would be lent him for his support and defence. The thought that God is with us, is of itself a great support to a good man in any state of difficulty or extremity. But the matter does not rest here. *David* relied not only on his presence and countenance, but on his actual support, and almighty protection; as *Job* expresses himself on another occasion, *will he plead against me with his great power; no, but he will put strength within me.*^a Or as *Asaph* has expressed himself, with the most divine Eloquence, *whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none on earth I desire besides thee; my flesh and my heart faileth, but thou art*

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the strength of my heart, and my portion for
ever.*^e And now from this subject I infer,

1. That the favor of God to good men, does not consist in exempting them from the common calamities of life, or from the stroke of death, but in supporting them in, and under them. Nay, sometimes the best men are the most afflicted ; they are visited in their persons, and in their nearest relations. *David had an Absalom descended from him, as well as a Solomon.* The former was totally abandoned and reprobate ; and the latter, though celebrated for his wisdom, yet was not the most eminent for his virtue and piety ; at least his heart was not so right with God, as to be stedfast in his covenant. *Wherefore, says Job, do the wicked live, become old, and are mighty in power ? their seed is established in their sight, and their offspring before their eyes ; their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them.*ⁱ The Psalmist speaks in much the same language. — *Behold these are the ungodly who prosper in the world, they increase in riches ; verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocence, for all*

^e Psalm lxxiii. 25, 26.

ⁱ Job xxi. 7.

all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning.^o We daily see like examples in the world. The ways of providence are often mysterious, and his judgments are a great deep. Nevertheless, good men have no cause to despond. *The Lord will strengthen them on a bed of languishing, he will make all their bed in their sickness.*^a *Fear not, says God to his ancient church of Israel, fear not, for I am with thee, be not dismayed, for I am thy God ; I will strengthen thee, I will help thee, yea, I will uphold thee, with the right hand of my righteousness.*^a Sirs, we must reckon upon affliction ; we must reconcile ourselves to the thoughts, and to the stroke of death ; we must be gathered to our fathers ; we must go to them, for they will not return to us ; we should therefore, labour to be accepted of God.

2. The unspeakable excellence and importance of religion. It is God alone who is able to sustain a sick and dying man. The thoughts of God are terrible to all impenitent sinners. *Their flesh trembleth for fear of God, and they are afraid of his judgments.*

^o Psal. lxxiii. 12, 13.

^a Psal. xli. 3.

^a If. xli. 10.

ments.^e But they who have committed their souls to God as a merciful creator, they who have entered into covenant with God in their health and vigour, they who have walked humbly and uprightly before him, in a course of holy obedience, and humbly repented of every act of disobedience, they are encouraged to plead, *cast me not away in old age, forsake me not when my strength faileth;*ⁱ they, and they alone, will be warranted and able to say, *yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*

I doubt not, many of you have, in your private meditations, as we have passed along in this discourse, prevented me in applying various observations which have occurred on this subject, to our reverend and honoured friend, whose death has occasioned my appearing once more in this place and pulpit, to pay the last instance of respect to his memory. It might have devolved on a more able hand, if he had not frequently requested it at mine; and to such a man, with whom *I once served as a son with a father in*

^e Psal. cxix. 120.

ⁱ Psal. lxxi. 9.

in the ministry of the gospel, I could deny nothing I was able to grant.

Dr. Benjamin Grosvenor was born the 1st of January, 1675. His father was an upholsterer of considerable business in the city of *London*. Both his parents were pious, and this son discovered, very early, both a sprightly genius, and a great concern about religion. When he was only ten years of age, he had a most awful sense of God on his mind, strong and terrifying convictions of the power and danger of sin, remained upon him for a considerable time, till at length, he heard a sermon at what was then called Mr. *Shallet's* meeting place, in *Gravel-lane, Southwark*, from a minister whose name he never knew, which brought him to a truer knowledge of God, his Saviour, himself, and of genuine religion. After this his soul found its true rest, and he perceived the difference between being awed by terror, and constrained by rational conviction. He remained in this happy state for several years, performing the duties and exercises of religion, not as a task, but a pleasure.

After he had acquired this serious and manly turn of mind, he no longer relished the

the diversions common to youth. But after the school hours, retired to his closet, spending many hours in prayer and devout meditation, and in reading books on divine subjects with unspeakable delight ; and was so frequent and fervent in these exercises, and carried them to so great a length, that his good parents, who rejoiced at the eminent piety of their son, were yet, at length, very apprehensive, that he would impair his health, and hazard his constitution.

He observes, (in a diary now before me, ^o) that “ his heart was glad at the approach “ of a Lord’s-day, that he might do nothing “ but worship, learn, praise, and enjoy God. “ *Speak Lord, for thy servant hears,* was the “ language of my soul ; I was ready to “ put in practice every thing, which was “ made known to me as my duty.” And then he adds these remarkable words, (well worthy the attention of us especially, who are called to the ministry of the gospel.) “ If the preacher, that day, had been shew-
“ ing

^o This diary, (which did not come to hand till I had finished the discourse, as I delivered it from the pulpit,) has both obliged, and enabled me, to make some alterations and additions, that I might do justice to the Doctor’s character.

“ ing tricks in divinity, either metaphysical, “ scholaſtical, or critical ; if he had been “ inflaming the paſſions of his audience, “ instead of delivering the plain things of “ life and godliſeſs, I had then miſſed my “ aim, at leaſt for that time.” “ Barbarous “ practice ! (adds he,) of thoſe minifters, “ who have opportunities of ſpeaking week- “ ly to great numbers, with all the advan- “ tage of publick countenance, authority, “ and ſupport, and confequently of doing “ extenſive good ; and who yet retail trash “ and wrath ; inflame the paſſions they “ ſhould allay ; and abuse to the disturbance “ of the world, the day which is appropri- “ ated to the preaching of the goſpel ; or “ who employ it in any other way, which “ has not a tendency to make men truly good, “ wifer, and better.”

“ In the miſt of theſe enjoyments, (ſays “ he,) it came into my mind how I might con- “ tinue and ſecure them ; I could not bear the “ thought of exchanging theſe delights, for “ the buſineſs or gains of the world. A life “ of christiaſ duty and enjoyment was what “ I wanted to ſecure. Upon that, I re- “ ſolved to be a minifter, and then my whole

D

“ life

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“ life and busines would lie in the things
“ I most delighted in.”

At this season his mind was so deeply impressed with the truth and importance of religion, that he thought he could convert every body, he thought he could make them *feel* as well as *hear*; that he could say so much concerning the love of God to mankind, the condescension and compassion of the Redeemer, the worth of the soul, the excellence and evidence of the gospel, the glory and dignity of heavenly things, and the vanity and insignificance of those trifles which commonly seduce men's affections from God, together with the glorious or tremendous consequences of a timely acceptance, or total refusal of the gospel salvation, as would certainly fasten the arrow of conviction so deep in the heart of a sinner, that he should not be able to draw it out.

Being at length, with the approbation of his parents, determined for the ministry, he pursued such studies as he thought most likely to qualify him for that important service; but although he had a great esteem for learning, yet he declares, that the dryness of the school exercises, and the sweetness

sweetness he tasted in practical religion, kept him backward in literature for some time, but afterwards he pursued it with more industry and pleasure, though he always delighted most in the study of the holy scriptures.

In the year 1693 he went from *London*, to prosecute his studies under the Reverend Mr. *Jollie*, at *Attercliffe* in *Yorkshire*, of whom he gives this amiable and instructive account, which from my own knowledge I am able to attest as true; “ that he was a “ man of an excellent spirit, of great spiri-
“ tuality and sweetness of temper. The or-
“ ders of his house were strict and re-
“ gular ; and few tutors maintained them
“ better, and with so little severity. Every
“ thing here was systematical. But the de-
“ fects in his institution, as to classical learn-
“ ing, free philosophy, and the catholic di-
“ vinity, were made amends for to those
“ who were designed for the pulpit, by
“ something those pupils who had any taste,
“ took from him in his publick perform-
“ ances. He had a charming voice, flow-
“ ing, and of a musical sound ; a natural e-
“ loquence ; his elocution and gesture were

“ such as would adorn an orator. The
“ pathetic was sometimes so heightened
“ with that divine enthusiasm, which is pe-
“ culiar to true devotion, that he would
“ make our hearts glow with a fervour,
“ which he kindled in the breasts even of
“ those, who endeavoured all they could not
“ to be moved by him.”

“ There have been tutors, (adds he,) of
“ greater learning, who have been capable
“ of laying out a greater compass of educa-
“ tion ; but at the same time it must be ac-
“ knowledged, that the relish for practical
“ religion ; that devotional spirit which was
“ so improved by his example ; that sweet-
“ ness of temper and benevolent turn of
“ mind, which a soul, of any thing the
“ the same make, insensibly catches from
“ such an example ; are things not every-
“ where to be met with, and yet have such
“ an influence towards our usefulness and
“ acceptance as ministers, as cannot easily
“ be supplied by any other qualities.”

I may observe, that no man appears to
have been more formed after his tutor's mo-
del, than was our deceased friend, Dr.
Grosvenor.

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In 1695 he returned from *Attercliffe* to *London*, and continued his studies under several masters, and particularly the *Hebrew* language under Monsieur *Capell*, who had formerly been a professor of the Oriental languages at *Saumur*, in *France*, and was then an illustrious refugee, having fled with his wife and children, and a few books, (and that was all !) out of the reach of *popish* cruelty.

About this time, he observes, that he had doubts arose in his mind about being a minister, which he ascribes partly to the disputes amongst christians. He says, “ he “ had a natural aversion to contest, he “ thought it equally ridiculous to side with “ any party. And yet if he did not, he “ knew it was the way to be dropt by both. “ He saw likewise a very ill taste amongst “ the people, crying up some ministers, and “ crying down others so very strangely. “ However, he blesses God he at length “ got the better of these discouragements, “ though they cost him many anxious hours, “ many prayers and tears.” Would to God too much of this taste did not still remain amongst us !

In 1699 he passed his tryals for the ministry, before the Reverend Mr. *Quick*, Mr. *Spademan*, Mr. *Thomas Rowe*, Mr. *Robert Fleming*, Mr. *Oldfield*, Mr. *Nesbitt*, and Mr. *Harris*, and the same year he was invited by Mr. *Oldfield*'s congregation in *Southwark*, to be their assistant Preacher. He accepted this call, but he shone with too conspicuous a lustre to be long confined to this station. His singular *acumen*, and lively imagination, and graceful utterance, and the warm devotion of his heart, which appeared in all his discourses, quickly brought him into *London*; first to a lecture at the *Old Jewry*, set up by some young citizens of considerable rank; and very handsomely supported; where he and his amiable friend, the Rev. Mr. *Samuel Rosewell*, shone with distinguished lustre; although the success and renown they acquired, few are now left alive either to remember or relate. One common friend of myself and the deceased, a member and manager of that lecture, and afterwards an honourable and worthy member of this congregation, thanks be to God, is yet alive, and has often mentioned his part in that service with no small pleasure.

Mr.

Mr. *Grosvenor* went into this lecture in the year 1702. and after the death of the Rev. Mr. *Slater* minister at *Croft-Square*, which happened *May 24. 1704.*^u was chosen to succeed him. He accepted this call, and was ordained *July 11.* the same year, and soon raised the congregation into a flourishing church, and a crowded auditory, which continued for many years without any considerable declension.

In the year 1703. he married Mrs. *Mary South*,^a daughter of Captain *Humphrey South*, of *Bethnal-green*; a family of eminence amongst the Protestant Dissenters.

The

^u There is this remarkable passage in the Doctor's diary concerning Mr. *Slater*.

The last Sacrament he administered, I received with him. He looked upon himself as near his end. At the close he took a solemn leave of the Congregation, and ended with these words, which were delivered, on his part, with the solemnity of a dying Patriarch blessing his children, and with the authority of an Apostle. “ I charge you before God, “ that you prepare to meet me at the day of judgment, as “ *my crown and my joy*, and that not one of you be found wanting to meet me there at the right hand of God.

^a Of whom the Doctor gives this character in his diary, “ *bonæ dotis, melioris formæ, et optimæ indolis;* ” of a handsome fortune, a comelier person, and of the most excellent disposition.

The increase of the church and auditory, made it proper for him to have an assistant. Accordingly, in the year 1705. the congregation made choice of Mr. (afterwards Dr.) *Samuel Wright* for this purpose; whose piety and whose useful preaching, and popular talents, are well known in this city.—On his being called to the pastoral office in the congregation at *Black-friars*, on the death of Mr. *Sylvester*, in the year 1709. I was chosen to succeed him; and my having stood in that relation to Dr. *Grosvenor*, and to this church for four years and upwards, with whom I lived in perfect harmony, I still review with pleasure, and account an honour. After my removal to *Hackney*, the Doctor was assisted first by the Reverend Mr. *Oldsworth*, and afterwards by the worthy and learned *Edmund Calamy*, B. D. lately deceased.

In 1707. he lost his wife, who was inexpressibly dear to him, ^e by a sudden and unexpected

^e How deeply and how devoutly his soul was affected on this occasion, I cannot express so well as by transcribing a few of his meditations from his diary, on the first Sacrament he administered after this melancholy providence.

“ Our Lord (says he,) having his own death in view,
“ greatly desired to eat the passover with his disciples. I have
“ several

unexpected stroke, in the midst of their joy,
after her supposed happy recovery on the
birth

“ *several deaths in view. I look back on one death, which has taken away my dearest earthly treasure ; I look forward upon my own, and I come now so to fix my eye on the death of Christ, that I may support the one, and prepare for the other.*

“ *God has appointed I should eat this passover with bitter herbs indeed ; and yet I am come here on purpose to abate the bitterness of my soul. There cannot be so much bitterness in that cup God has lately put into my hands, as there is sweetness in this cup of blessing which we bless. The bread of affliction, and the water of affliction, have been the provision of my lonely table ; I would with the more eager appetite, sit down to the bread of life that comes down from God !*

“ *Lord ! to whom should we go, but unto thee ? Thou hast the words of eternal life. Words of eternal life, will come like healing balm into a spirit, wounded by a death, that strikes as deep into me, as my own. Words of art and eloquence won’t do ; I come hither for words of eternal life. Thy Consolations O God, are not small ; all are but small without thine !*

“ *Philosophy is a dry well ; and an empty cloud. The fine spun reasonings, and the flourishes of wit, are works of men at ease. They teach me how to write and speak, but not to endure. No ; but the words of eternal life, are spirit and life. Speak such words to my troubled passions, and they will be asswaged ; as when thou saidst, Peace, be still, to the obedient winds and waves.*

“ *I flee from one death, to get relief in another. From the death of a dear Relative, to the death of an infinitely dearer Saviour. — And what is there, O my soul, that can*

birth of her second child. But though he lost his beloved companion, he retained the esteem of her family, who always treated him with respect and honour.

In 1712. he married his second wife, *Mrs. Elizabeth Prince*, by whom he had four sons, *William, Samuel, George, and Richard*. All of whom are dead except the youngest. But his children inheriting neither their father's prudence nor piety, occasioned him very heavy affliction, which he supported with a patience and resignation, that religion alone could inspire. God grant that his only son who now survives, may live to repair the family's honour !

In 1716. he was chosen one of the six Preachers at the *Merchant's Lecture, at Salter's-Hall,*

“ be bitter in the death of the most beloved upon earth, that
“ is not sweetened by the death of him who was most be-
“ loved in Heaven !

“ As at the first marriage it was observed, that *for this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and cleave to his wife.* — So in this sacramental contract, which is our espousal to Christ, must a man leave wife and children, and all the world, if required, that *he may cleave to the Lord with full purpose of heart, &c.*”

• The Doctor had only one Son by this marriage, *Benjamin South Grosvenor*, who lived to grow up, but who died many years before him; and a daughter who died an infant.

ter's Hall, which post he filled with great reputation, till he resigned it in the year 1749.

Of how friendly a disposition he was, and how ready to do kind offices, I can declare from my own experience, during the first years of my publick ministry; nor am I ignorant how honourably and generously he acquitted himself in some transactions of a private nature, which respected his worldly interest, and which were occasioned by some misfortunes that happened in his father's family, where he readily gave up, what it was generally agreed, he had an unquestionable right to retain. And his father and mother being reduced in their advanced years, received the fullest proof of the high regard their pious son paid to the fifth commandment.

His stature was low, but his mien was manly and graceful; and though his constitution was rather tender than robust, yet he was seldom laid aside from his public work.

His voice though small was sweet and melodious, especially until the year 1726, when he was obliged to submit to a painful operation of having his *Uvula* cut out of his

mouth in consequence of a violent inflammation ; and which ever afterwards occasioned an impediment in his pronunciation. Nevertheless, he had so great skill in managing his voice, (owing, perhaps in some measure, to his knowledge in musick,) that I have hardly heard any speaker more capable of affecting and commanding an audience. He delivered serious truths from the pulpit with uncommon freedom and energy ; and if it should be allowed, that occasionally, some of his *lively turns* needed an apology, I am bold to say, many of them demanded admiration.

His judgment and faith, in the doctrines of the christian religion, were steady and unshaken. And though I know not that his sentiments ever much altered, on any points of controversy, yet he detested censoriousness, and abounded in candour and moderation. “ I thank God, (says he in his diary,) for that temper of mind and genius, “ which has made it natural to me to have “ an aversion to bigotry. This has improved constantly with my knowledge. And “ the enlarging my mind towards those who “ differ from me, has kept pace with my “ illumin-

“ illumination and intellectual improvements.
“ *Agree to differ*, is a good motto. The
“ reason and loveliness of such a friendly
“ disposition would recommend it, and I
“ am persuaded, people would almost take
“ it of themselves, if it were not for the
“ several arts used to prevent it.”

He used to say, “ if he was pleased with
“ any of his own compositions, it is what
“ he has entitled, *The temper of Jesus*;” and I
do not wonder at this preference, as he
habitually laboured to transcribe into his own
heart and life, what he there so charmingly
describes.

But as man is born to trouble, and finds
this his surest inheritance in the present
world, and as there is no season of life, in
which religious truths are so felt and relish-
ed, as a time of affliction, and as the piece
itself is indeed a very masterly performance;
I am inclined to think, his *Mourner* bids the
fairest to perpetuate his memory.

In 1730 the university of *Edinburgh*
conferred on him the degree of *Doctor in
divinity*, in the most respectful manner, he
not having the least knowledge of their in-
tention,

38 *A Funeral Sermon on the Death of*
tention, till the *diploma* was delivered into
his hands.

Besides the books he published, to which
he prefixed his name, he wrote some small
pieces, both political and controversial, which
are not universally known to be his.

Notwithstanding his severe afflictions, and
his love to devotion and retirement, he en-
joyed life as much as most men, he abound-
ed in lively fallies of wit, and few carried
innocent chearfulness, or pleasant conversa-
tion higher, amongst chosen friends, than
he did; but when pastoral duty required
him to visit the sick, or comfort the distres-
sed, he endeavoured to open springs of *di-
vine* consolation in the soul, and was solici-
tous, as a worker together with God, to
turn the severest afflictions into inestimable
blessings.

He was a minister, in *London*, of distin-
guished reputation upwards of fifty years;
but the infirmities of age obliging him to
withdraw from publick service; he resign-
ed the pastoral office in the year 1749, and
was soon succeeded by your present worthy
and excellent minister, Mr. *John Hodge*.

The

The recess which the Doctor gained by this means, he employed in reading with so much diligence, that hardly any new book on morals, or religion, or polite learning, escaped him.

During his retirement a painful disorder increased upon him, and by degrees wore him out; but though many heard him groan, none heard him murmur or repine. I never perceived him to express any fear of dying, he viewed the darksome valley without any gloom or horror, he had long rejoiced in hope of the glory of God, firmly believing in Jesus as the resurrection and the

..... *who raised up Christ
..... to give and earnest that he
..... all bodies of his faithful
servants; by his spirit which dwelleth in them.*

To a friend at Dr. Watts's funeral, who took notice of his habitual chearfulness, he made this reply, “I'll smile on death, if God will smile on me.” And this temper of mind, owing in part to a natural sweetness of disposition, but principally to the supports of a divine faith, he preserved to the last. I took an affecting leave of him the night

he

^c Rom. viii. 11.

he retired into his chamber, where he remained seven weeks; during which, his pain was very violent, but his patience had its perfect work. In my last visit he told me, no body knew what he endured, but he did not murmur or complain. He lost his speech some days, but not his senses, till he slept in Jesus, on Lord's-day morning, *August* the 27th, in the eighty-third year of his age.

*Blessed are the dead who thus die in the Lord; they shall rest from their labours, and their works shall follow them;*ⁱ and they shall assuredly arise again to consummate happiness and honour, when the returning Saviour shall come to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them who believe.^o

ⁱ Rev. xiv. 13.

^o 2 Thes. i. 10.

Missing Page